



September 7, 2012

The Honorable Harry Reid  
Senate Majority Leader  
S-221, United States Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Senate Republican Leader  
S-230, United States Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable John A. Boehner  
Speaker of the House  
H-232, United States Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
House Minority Leader  
H-204, United States Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Majority Leader Reid, Senator McConnell, Speaker Boehner and Representative Pelosi:

We write to request, contingent upon the issuance of a federal disaster declaration for the New England groundfish fishery from the Department of Commerce, your support in securing \$100 million in disaster assistance for New England fishermen and fishing communities. These funds will be used to provide both immediate economic relief to our region's struggling groundfish industry, and to make targeted investments that will allow the fleet to survive and become more sustainable in the years ahead.

We have stressed to the Department of Commerce that it is imperative they take immediate and decisive action to provide a disaster declaration for the New England fishery. For decades, our fishermen and their communities have worked cooperatively with our federal partners to comply with fishery management objectives, including those of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, which are critical to protecting our ocean resources for future generations and the long-term vitality of the industry. However, this effort to rebuild depleted groundfish stocks, which recent stock assessments indicate are not recovering as quickly as necessary to meet the rebuilding requirements of the law, is severely limiting fishing opportunities and endangering our fleets. Accordingly, our states have made requests for federal fishery disaster declarations, and have documented dramatic changes in our fleets' fishing opportunities, whether through constriction of the fleet or longer steams to productive fishing grounds, as well as the significant financial losses of our fleet and shoreside services in recent years. Unfortunately, despite the peril of our fishermen, we continue to wait for the Department of Commerce to respond to those requests. Now, the need for disaster relief is more critical than ever as fishermen and related businesses in our coastal communities are bracing for additional, potentially devastating cuts to the New England groundfishery in 2013.

These preliminary numbers, based on a recently released interim report from the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), suggest dramatic declines in several major groundfish stocks in the New England fishery. While we understand that this resource disaster is not the fault of our fishermen and that it is necessary and important for NMFS to protect the long-term viability of

the stocks, these potential reductions in current Annual Catch Limits (ACL) and restrictions on fishing on Georges Bank, in the Gulf of Maine, and Southern New England waters will be damaging to our fleet at a time when many businesses are already struggling to remain viable. In addition to the direct impact on groundfish catch limits, there will likely be indirect impacts to other fisheries on which these same permit holders and many other New England fishermen are also dependent. Consequently, conditions are now overwhelmingly in favor of a disaster declaration, and we are hopeful the Department of Commerce will act swiftly on all pending requests.

Our fishermen cannot afford to wait any longer for critical economic assistance, and thus we urge you, upon issuance of a federal disaster declaration for our groundfishery, to exercise your Congressional authority and immediately appropriate \$100 million in aid for New England fishermen and fishing communities. This funding will be used to mitigate economic losses resulting from requirements imposed by Magnuson-Stevens to rebuild groundfish stocks, and will provide urgent relief for our fishermen and their communities in crisis in both the near and long term.

Each of us will collaborate with our fishermen and the Department of Commerce to develop a detailed spending plan to address the needs of our individual communities and states. We anticipate these funds will provide targeted economic assistance, whether through investments in the safety and sustainability of the fleet, providing job training for fishermen to help deal with changes in fishery management, or temporary financial relief. Additionally, funding will be directed to support sector operating costs and cover at-sea monitoring costs to ensure our fishermen will avoid paying this otherwise out of pocket expense at a time when they are already facing severe economic challenges. Further, a portion of the requested funds will be used for cooperative research focused on improving stock assessments and the systems of data collection for the fishery. The severity of the potential consequences of inaccurate or uncertain science demand that all steps are taken to ensure that the data used to set catch limits is as robust and accurate as possible. With the livelihood of our fishing communities at stake, continued improvement of fisheries science remains a top priority.

As Governors, we remain committed to preserving our historic and economically important fishing industry and coastal communities for future generations. We stand ready to work with you, the Department of Commerce, our New England Congressional delegation, fishermen and the New England Fishery Management Council to mitigate the impact of this disaster on our fishery. We appreciate your help in this effort to provide our fishermen economic relief they desperately need.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Paul R. LePage". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a prominent loop at the end of the last name.

Governor Deval Patrick  
Massachusetts

Governor Paul LePage  
Maine

Governor Lincoln Chafee  
Rhode Island

Governor John Lynch  
New Hampshire

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Cc: Acting Secretary Rebecca Blank, U.S. Department of Commerce  
Senator Daniel K. Inouye, Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee  
Senator Thad Cochran, Ranking Member, Senate Appropriations Committee  
Representative Harold Rogers, Chair, House Appropriations Committee  
Representative Norman D. Dicks, Ranking Member, House Appropriations Committee  
Senator John F. Kerry  
Senator Scott P. Brown  
Senator Olympia J. Snowe  
Senator Susan M. Collins  
Senator Jeanne Shaheen  
Senator Kelly Ayotte  
Senator Jack Reed  
Senator Sheldon Whitehouse  
Representative Michael E. Capuano  
Representative Barney Frank  
Representative William R. Keating  
Representative Steven F. Lynch  
Representative Edward J. Markey  
Representative James P. McGovern  
Representative Richard E. Neal  
Representative John W. Olver  
Representative John F. Tierney  
Representative Niki Tsongas  
Representative Mike Michaud  
Representative Chellie Pingree  
Representative Charles F. Bass  
Representative Frank Guinta  
Representative David Cicilline  
Representative Jim Langevin  
Undersecretary Jane Lubchenco, U.S. Department of Commerce  
Assistant Secretary Eric Schwaab, U.S. Department of Commerce